

The Appleby Archaeology Group invited Erik Matthews, Fieldwork Officer of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham & Northumberland (AASDN), to give the first talk of 2014 in their new venue at Centre 67 on October 14th. Erik, who had last visited in 2011, gave the group an insight into the latest finds at the AASDN excavation at Hornby Castle in North Yorkshire.

Erik first gave an outline of how the excavation had initially developed from an investigation of the 18th century banqueting hall and how various finds in the grounds together with desk based research, had led to a expectation that the site had been occupied from a much earlier date. Erik explained that as the excavations and research had moved on, the focus had shifted to an earlier moated site shown on an estate map of 1766 which had been produced for the landscaping work carried out by 'Capability' Brown. After the discovery of an earlier building on the site, this area is now confidently identified as a 'plaisance' - a place in the grounds of the castle where elite guests were entertained. Erik drew comparisons with similar sites at Kenilworth Castle (built by John of Gaunt) and at Bodiam Castle in Sussex. He went on to say that the existence of such a lavish facility in the wilds of North Yorkshire had been entirely unexpected.

Although the original Banqueting Hall had initially been the source of many finds, the plaisance at Hornby has become the site which keeps on giving - as the excavation extends into additional trenches, earlier and earlier artefacts are surfacing, most of them related to high status activity. It appears that the original medieval building on the site dates to the time of Sir John Neville, a household knight of Edward 3rd, in the 14th century, a fact alluded to by the discovery of quantities of high status pottery of the period, together with (rare) window glass in significant quantities. However, an Andenne ware lamp base, almost unknown in Northern England & dating to the 12th century was also found, hinting at an earlier building on the site. This was confirmed by the discovery of a raised timber floor typical of high status buildings of that period. Even more unexpected are recent finds including a pre-conquest wine container and a pottery sequence from a sealed pre-conquest context. Erik pondered whether or not such discoveries, lacking any evidence of disruption or damage, might eventually lead to a re-evaluation of the Harrying of the North by William the Conqueror - could it have been a localised rather than a general event?

In his presentation Erik showed slides of many of the discoveries dating from the very earliest found to those excavated just a few weeks ago.

The excavations will continue under the auspices of the AASDN in 2015 and hopefully beyond. Some Appleby Archaeology members take part on a regular basis and any other members who may wish to are invited to participate.

Erik was, as ever, warmly thanked for his fascinating talk.

The next talk will be on November 11th at Centre 67 in Appleby, where the subject will be the archaeological investigations around the find spot of the iconic Crosby Garrett Helmet.